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QUESTIONS TO ASSIST IN DESIGNING SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

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Have you ever walked into an elementary classroom and thought you were in the Christmas display window of an F.A.O. Schwartz toy store? The teacher is, putting it mildly, creative and talented at making materials. Many of us are not this gifted, yet want to generate supplementary materials of the teacher-made variety for our own students. This is a good reason for becoming involved in designing and producing materials. A second and even more practical reason is to help solve a real problem: the classroom is deficient in materials and there is little or no financial support available. What would you do in a similar situation?

Do not, cautions Mangieri, "throw in the towel instructionally (1980, p. 20)." Instead, realize that we don't often have maximum conditions for instruction. Continue to request funds for what you feel you need and, at the same time, adapt parts of previously used materials and begin to make other materials. "Assume a spirit of adventure about find and adapting readily available, free and inexpensive materials (Stahl, p. 71)."

Questions First

Our reasons are clear—we want and need additional materials—and we are ready to begin. Almost. In order to avoid unnecessary complications later, it's critical at this point to consider your rationale for choosing the materials you want to design or adapt. Your accumulated experiences in the classroom should help you answer these questions about the three "C's": Concepts, content, clients.

First, what are the major concepts you want to teach? If the concepts are important enough, you'll need to devote extra time to reinforcing them throughout the typical school day. It stands to reason then, that any supplementary materials—whether they are vocabulary match games or newspaper feature stories to model—ought to relate to the concept.

Second, how complex is the content and how is it organized? As you analyze the content of your social studies unit for example, is the information presented clearly and in such a way that the most important information is easy to extract? Or, as is oftn the case, do you have to select certain sections and present them to the class firtst? Brainstorming, categorizing information, even expanding a neglected piece of content through newspaper "advertising" are activities that require some prepared supplementary materials to sustain them.

Third, what is its value to your student clients and how familiar are they with it? Here, the supplementary material itself comes under scrutiny. If it doesn't help reinforce instructional concepts and/or help you deliver portions of content, should it be allotted any instructional time? If, on the other hand, it does promise to extend concepts or support content, are your particular students familiar enough with it (rules, routine) to know what to do without taking up extra direct teaching time?

With answers to these common-sense questions at your fingertips, you should be able to design appropriate materials in any of the categories which follow.

Games

One obvious benefit that comes with playing instructional games in the classroom is instant motivation. It's a change of pace, even in the classroom where every Friday morning from 10:00 to 11:00 Concentration or Challenge of Champions or College Bowl is played. There are few surprises in store for the players except one—Who are the winners? Secondly, games provide skill practice and "the best way to acquire most skills is to begin early and practice them often" (Harris and Smith, 1980, p. 404). Combining these two thoughts produces a good answer to the question: "Why are games so popular?" Answer: Students will be reinforcing skills and having a good time doing it.

The most often used type of game over the years has been flash cards or game boards plus word cards. Card games and spin-the-dial or shake-the-dice board games are used to assist students in categorizing, reviewing vocabulary meanings, sequencing, etc.

The cost of teacher-made games is not necessarily less than commercial materials, if durability and professional appearance are taken into consideration (Snyder, 1981). Changing a familiar commercial game or favorite "old" game into a new one is easier to do than starting from scratch. Amount of teacher time, perhaps more than any other factor, needs to be considered. If the game is worthwhile to your students, it's worth spending some time making it. How can you judge the relative importance of the concept being practiced to your students' learning?

One illustration of this might be a teacher who holds a top-down belief about reading and is concerned about what she perceives is an overemphasis on phonics in many materials in her classroom. Her goal was to help her students practice translating visual symbols into meaning. Deciding it was worth the time, she developed a whole language reading game for her second graders. Based on a favorite book they had read, there were different colored game cards for comprehension, synonym substitution, sentence completion and chunks of meaning.

The Newspaper

For years, teachers at all levels and virtually all subject areas have made some instructional use of the newspaper. Whether it's looking at classified ads, cutting out comic strips or buying

a classroom subscription to a major newspaper, students have been exposed to the newspaper as part of their school experience.

Newspapers, as do games, seem to generate enthusiasm in the classroom. They also provide a good resource to develop, reinforce and refine reading skills, especially comprehension. And, as a bonus—newspapers are a good way to communicate with parents when homework assignments are based on newspapers (Criscuolo, 1981).

Two efficient methods for designing newspaper activities are to 1) begin with a particular competency your students need to work toward and select different parts of the paper for the activities; or 2) begin with the various parts of the paper and develop activities according to your students' competency needs. To illustrate, the following are examples designed in keeping with the two methods mentioned:

1) From Comprehension Skill to Newspaper Section

Remembering - Activity to help students focus on information explicity stated.
-Follow a sports team by recording their progress on sports pages.
-Read an article on front page, noting the 5 W's. Write a summary paragraph using the data.

Inferring - Activity to help students conjecture about what is not explicity stated.
-Examine ads in any section and determine for whom they are intended and how words are used to sell.

Evaluating - Activity to help students make and support judgment about what they have read.
-Determine the point of view of a sports column or editorial on editorial page. Evaluate that position.

Appreciating - Activity to help students become personally involved as they read.
-Read any human interest story in national or local news and respond empathetically in writing.
-Write a story or poem in response to a feature story.

2) From Newspaper Section to Reading Skill
Lost and Found - Find and read the ads. Write a story behind one of the ads pretending to be the animal or item lost.
Comic Strip - Choose a favorite comic strip character and use as many adjectives as possible to describe the character.

Sale Items - Children choose an item of their own that they would like to sell. After reading the classified ads under "For Sale" to see what information is given, a four-line ad is written to help sell the item (Criscuolo).

The advantages of newspapers range from their minimal cost, source of fresh ideas, different reading levels, to their appeal to younger and older students. As the teaching

ideas above illustrate, writing instruction as well as reading can be highlighted. Finally, one more important benefit of newspapers in the classroom is their natural appeal to the multiple cultures in our society; teachers can use newspapers to help bridge cultural differences (Shields, 1980).

Television

Teachers and parents have become acutely aware in the last few years or so that school age children spend many hours watching television. There is evidence to suggest that a person's television interests serve a purpose just as book interests do; each medium satisfies a different need. For example, Schramm, et al (1961) reported a decrease over time in the use of comic books and radio (fantasy need) while book use remained the same (information need). One survey (Feeley, 1974) of intermediate grade students revealed associations between reading and information and between television and entertainment; sports viewers read about sports.

An extension of this line of inquiry is whether or not students' preferences for reading or television are related to the quality of their reading choices. Fourth, fifth and sixth graders studied by Neuman (1982) who were classified as "heavy TV - light reading" tending to choose books of lower quality than the other groups. It behooves us, then, as teachers and parents to 1) provide stimulating, high-quality reading materials; and 2) develop television literacy at home and in school.

Learning about advertising techniques, learning how to make decisions about programs to watch, learning about the equipment behind the scenes at television studios are areas where teachers and parents can intervene. Obtaining scripts of popular programs available from networks, some teachers direct plays from the episodes or organize actual "productions" of TV shows.

Another plus, one that corresponds to the use of the newspaper, is that television "exposes children to language not used in their community" (DeHaven, 1982, p. 482). It helps them expand their vocabularies and sentence patterns but, most importantly, television takes children to different cultures. The problem is, in the final analysis, not one of too much or too little television time. The real problem is the quality of that time. Do we use television as an effective way of improving communication or do we shun it instructionally as a mindless, spectator sport?

Conclusion - What About Microcomputers

It's quickly becoming a moot point whether to purchase or not to purchase a microcomputer for your elementary school. They are here and the real question, I believe, is how can we use the microcomputer to provide good reading instruction? As P. David Pearson put it during a recent speech... "We would like more from computer programs than 'electronic workbooks.' There is a need for software that allows for the reader as writer and the writer as reader to interact with printed language. Word processing equipment has this potential."

Software, just as games, the newspaper and television supplementary material need to make sense instructionally in order to be worth the investment in time and money. They should make sense to classroom teachers who ask questions about major concepts, content, and value to clients.

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